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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Japan's current educational reform and discusses its impact on student learning. Section 1 describes the main features of the reform efforts, which focus on choice, diversity, flexibility, competition, and excellence in education. Section 2 looks at Japan's changing system of teacher education, noting the dropping rates of teacher employment and the resulting cuts in preservice student enrollments and reductions in numbers of teacher educators. Citizens are demanding quality education but criticizing schools and teachers in their inability to cope with problematic behaviors in schools. As a result, the government has declared that all preservice teachers must take a course in psychological counseling. In 1998 the Ministry of Education decided to revise the teacher certification system. The change is designed to be incremental and melioristic, though many teachers consider it dramatic. Japan's teacher education system is cognitively oriented and knowledge centered. The educational reform is working to upgrade the quality of inservice education, and more graduate programs are being developed. Section 3 discusses the impact of inquiry-based learning on student learning, noting the effect of adding inquiry-based learning into the curriculum. It examines the importance of colleges and universities playing a major role in the reconstruction of elementary and secondary education. The paper notes that Japan's ongoing educational reform will be strongly influenced by U.S. education. (Contains 25 references.) (SM)

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The Impact of the Present Educational Reform upon Student Learning in Japan

by

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**Paper presented at
the Japan/United States Teacher Education Consortium**

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The Impact of the Present Educational Reform upon Student Learning in Japan

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Introduction

The year 1998 was an astonishing year for educators in Japan. In April of the same year, the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture (hereafter, the Ministry of Education) proposed an action plan, in which a series of educational policies were listed and would be enacted within the same year.¹ This movement was partly expected due to the recent trend of educational reform which started early 1990s. However, as the publication of various government papers on educational reform and the consequent enactment of related law show, this reform movement in the 1990s will be the largest reform we have ever experienced in the past 50 years.

Some educators say that this reform movement is the "third major reform" in the history of modern education in Japan. The first reform in education began during the Meiji Restoration period, which started in the late 1860s. The second reform started soon after World War II. Under the initiative of our national government, the present educational reform, following the policies and suggestions proposed by the Ad Hoc Educational Council established in the mid-1980s, began to restructure and renovate the educational structure we have constructed during the past 50 years. Our educational system, whose significance as a harbinger of the Westernization and modernization was highly appreciated in and outside of our country, has nurtured the tradition of "unity, standardization, efficiency, and equality." It is evident that this system has created a solid foundation for responding to the various social demands by producing a huge supply of human capital needed in the private

and public sectors.

Nevertheless, our present educational system, which has been considered to be the epitome of excellence and equality, seems to be staggering partly because of the various social and educational problems caused by the dysfunction of families, schools, and communities in recent years. All of a sudden, educational researchers and mass media started reporting such educational problems as child abuse, bullying in the school, disorder in the classroom, and school phobia and non-attendance in the school. For educators, this phenomenon seems to be based on a series of muckraking exposes and now turns out to be a cause of trouble. In some sense, educators and teachers are accused of not fulfilling their duties. Obviously, one of the imperatives of the present educational reform is to establish effective and efficient systems and programs to cope with these educational problems.

Also, our school system as an "efficient sorting mechanism" is under severe criticism. This criticism has been persistently raised for more than 20 years. In recent years, even the Ministry of Education criticized the demerits of a naive faith in "credentialism" or "degreeocracy" in education.² In a nutshell, our school system is controlled by the myth of the "supremacy of cognitive intelligence," whose values entrance examinations and test scores can prove. The entrance examination to colleges and universities (especially "undergraduate" colleges) is so vital for the youth that it is considered to be the critical moment in their lives. The educational system in Japan has been a Procrustean bed which orders the youth to cut off and discard useless and unnecessary interests and efforts when they have to concentrate on preparing for entrance examinations. In the present reform movement, the

Ministry suggests that too much faith in school education and keen competition for colleges will be hazardous to the healthy growth of our youth. Thus, another imperative of the present reform is clear. It is to create concrete policies and action plans to reduce tensions and frictions caused by the uniform and rigid system of schooling and entrance examination.

In addition to these imperatives, we should note that the creation of a new teacher education system is an urgent agenda for the present reform in education. The Ministry also started revising the present national system of teacher education last year.³ A new program of teacher education will be implemented in the year 2000 almost all over Japan. This program, responding to the rising criticisms toward public schools and requests for higher qualifications for teachers in general, emphasizes knowledge of pedagogy and psychological counseling (rather than subject area), the length of practicum (from two weeks to four weeks), and training at graduate schools to seek for higher qualification (more Master's degrees for teachers). Owing to this revision, some colleges may discard their teacher education programs in consideration of their own cost-benefit analysis. This revision has caused anxiety and turmoil among the colleges and universities which offer teacher education programs. However, national teacher education colleges, for the sake of their own survival, quickly responded to these demands and have almost finished implementing new programs of their own. It has been a common agreement that a further effort will be necessary at the graduate level to improve the teacher education system as a whole and to upgrade the teaching profession in our country.

From the perspective of student learning, the present reform policies propose a variety of new ideas. Among them are the

introduction of a new style of learning (so-called "integrated learning" or inquiry-based learning), establishment of a 6-year secondary school, computer education, oral English, volunteer activities, etc.⁴ Especially, the integrated learning as a required subject will be introduced to all levels of schooling, including colleges and universities. One of the main objectives of this subject is to nurture the active and inquiring attitudes and habits among students so accustomed to the passive and one-way communication style in the classrooms. At the college level, this new type of learning will be called "learning through thematic inquiry" or inquiry-based learning. Those students who wish to earn a teacher certification should also follow this new policy. They have to take at least two credits in a "seminar in teaching comprehensive inquiry-based learning."

Despite these policy statements, many teachers doubt if any major reforms can be widely introduced and practiced at schools. Also, some educators doubt if the style of student learning will be really transformed. More than 50 percent of the high school students bound for colleges and universities will follow the same paths as their predecessors. They will continue studying the required subjects for entrance examinations appointed by respective colleges. Even though it is said that entrance examinations are diversified due to the introduction of essay writing, interviews, and separate admissions offices, the fundamental structure is still solid and stable. For the time being, owing to the decrease in the number of children studying at the K-12 levels, it is predicted that the competition for entering colleges will be less keen year by year.

Still, a horde of students will vie with each other to enter

the prestigious colleges. This is the reason why some researchers assert that there will be a "polarization" among high school students in the near future: those who will study hard to enter prestigious colleges and the others who will seek easier ways to enter colleges.⁵ However, there are no indications that the time and energy spent on integrated learning will be highly appreciated at the time of college admission. The college entrance examination system, which has deeply affected student learning for a century, is still the inevitable gatekeeper. In this sense, any school reforms without a major change in the college entrance examination system will be in vain. In the following sections, we will examine the concrete features of the present educational reform and its impact upon students' learning.

1. The Main Features of the Present Educational Reform

In April 1998, the Ministry of Education announced a plan to transform the whole configuration of educational systems for the 21st century. Those far-ranging suggestions include the search for stronger ties among family, school and community, more flexibility in school education, more discretion for local boards of education (decentralization), and the qualitative improvement in college education and search for excellence in research.⁵ For these suggestions to be actualized, a series of action plans are needed to ensure the transformation of all aspects of education in our country. In these policy statements, we can see the strong leadership and will of the government to renovate our present educational systems. Educators and teachers also regard these not as a bunch of useless bureaucratic papers but as a series of mandates which clearly announce what they have to follow and to achieve. In fact, the government issued a series of laws and regulations in the same year. While some of the policy plans were executed within the

same year, other plans also have clear time limits on when to start their implementation. Almost ten years have passed since the new reform in higher education started. Within a few years, a new series of reform programs will be implemented in various levels of school education.

The imperatives for the present educational reform are characterized by such ideas as "diversity, free competition, global standards, etc." The origin of the present reform goes back to the establishment of the Ad Hoc Education Council during the mid-1980s in order to introduce "diversity in education, respect for individuality, search for international standards."⁶ By the end of the 1980s, these educational reform policies were initially applied to higher education. Even during the 1980s, it was said that colleges and universities would be obliged to cope with the drastic decrease in the number of 18-year-olds in the near future. In the year 2007, the number will be 40 % less than the peak year in the early 1990s, when the population of 18-year-olds was 2.1 million. In April 1999, this prediction will be partly actualized and almost 50 % of two-year colleges and 20 % of 4-year colleges are facing a decrease in their student enrollment.⁷

In 1989, the Ministry of Education, in view of this trend, announced the policy of "deregulation in higher education." This soon resulted in the reform of college programs and curricula, introduction of teaching devices which were originally introduced in American colleges, i.e., the semester system, evening classes, the class syllabus, teaching assistants, office hours, foreign student advisers, and so on.⁸ For almost a decade, this deregulation policy has caused drastic changes in university organization. Newly organized schools were established, newly integrated departments appeared, and

liberal and general education divisions were merged into new schools and, thus, nominally disappeared.

The demand for change is not limited to higher education. It has spread to all levels of education by the late 1990s. First, care for students' mental health has become one of the most pressing tasks at the compulsory education level. Because of too much stress upon intellectual learning and examinations at all levels of schooling, the students are said to be lacking the positive motivation in their lives. To nurture this positive motivation, the Ministry decided to reduce the grade 1-12 course of study by almost 30%. A five-day school week will be fully practiced nationally at the K-12 levels from the year 2002. Teacher candidates are recommended to study more pedagogy and counseling subjects (rather than their major subjects), so that they can deal with students' psychological and mental problems more effectively.

Secondly, more "choice" will be introduced at the primary and secondary education levels. In some local districts, "6-year secondary schools" were instituted in April 1999. The governments, both national and local, will encourage establishing this type of secondary school in every prefecture. This policy will offer parents and children the opportunity to choose between the current 3-year junior high schools plus 3-year senior highs and the 6-year secondary schools. They can also choose between "public" high schools and "private" ones. In the near future, "free choice of school districts" will be introduced as a new policy, which will be considered to increase opportunities of choice in education. Some educators object that this policy of more choice in education will widen the gap between those who have already enough cultural capital and those who have less.⁹

Thirdly, various governmental reports and policies stress the importance of a new approach of learning, which is called integrated learning. In this approach, such studies as environmental awareness, computer education, health and welfare, international relations, and learning traditional Japanese culture are included. It also aims to promote those learning activities which will strengthen students' interests and nurture their problem-solving skills. It is considered to be a good opportunity for students to search for their own self and occupational identities through engaging in various tasks and workshops. In essence, this is a revival of the "problem solving" type of education, which was widely practiced during the 1950s in Japan, though its present learning activities widely reflect the new socio-cultural trends. For some educators, it is a return to the Deweyan idea of "education through occupations." It was originally intended that the introduction of experiential learning would help cultivate student's skills of self-study and self-knowledge.

This subject is expected to work effectively at the primary education level. However, quite a few teachers have some apprehensions about whether this subject will be attractive for the students especially enrolled in the college-bound track at high schools. Their main goal is to prepare for the coming examinations, not for their lives twenty years in the future. As proposed by the report of the University Council, this inquiry-based learning will be the central idea for college education in the early 21st century. We will discuss the impact of this learning style later.

In summary, the present educational reform will further strengthen the principles of "choice, diversity, flexibility,

competition, and excellence in education." We did not mention much about the search for "standards." However, standards are always implied whenever the "government" policy reports are published, later they are expressed in generalizations. Each school will make its own efforts to implement these general standards. Now is the time when these standards are being set and then each school will develop its own interpretation and set its goals.

2. The Changing System of Teacher Education

For a decade or so, teacher education colleges and universities, most of which are nationally endowed institutions, have been worried about the dropping rates of teacher employment in each local district. As a recent example, the rates of those graduates from 52 national teacher education colleges who were hired as public schoolteachers in 1997 ranged from 25.5% (Saga U.) to 65% (Jyoetsu Kyoiku U.).¹⁰ Those colleges and universities were forced to cut their student enrollments due mainly to the decreasing number of newly employed teachers. Thus, the student enrollment at national teacher education colleges, whose total number of enrollment was about 20,000 in the late 1980s, dropped by 25% during the past 10 years. Now, this number is expected to fall further, down to 10,000 within the three-year period from 1998 to 2000.¹¹ In accordance with this decrease in student enrollment, the number of the faculty at these colleges has been reduced, too.

The decreasing number of children in our society directly or indirectly causes this drastic change in teacher education colleges in our country. In the mid-1960s, the number of 18-year-olds reached its peak, which was almost 2.5 million. It decreased from 2.05 million in 1992 to 1.55 million in 1999 and is expected to be 1.2 million in 2009.¹² This number will

probably remain nearly constant for the next 30 years. Since we have fewer children, people demand schools and teachers to be more responsible for providing a higher quality of education, more individualized teaching, and practical and useful learning. The demand for more qualified teachers is evident in a new government report on teacher education which was published in October, 1998.¹³ It is obvious that the focus of teacher education will shift from the present emphasis on "undergraduate" programs to "graduate" programs in the coming years. Especially, the establishment of more Master's programs for teachers is an urgent issue in our country.

At the same time, schools and teachers are bitterly accused of being responsible for producing the great number of student maladjustment and mental problems in schools. They are criticized for their inability to cope with such pathological phenomena as bullying, non-attendance, disregard for school rules, and disorder in the classroom. Even some teachers are accused of being not able to control students in their classes at the primary school level. According to the research conducted in Tokyo this June, more than 20% of elementary schools are experiencing classroom disorders. (Among 1,393 schools, 314 of them answered so.)¹⁴ For the past few years, schools and teachers have been highly sensitive to the criticisms against them reported by the mass media.

In order to tackle these criticisms, the government declared that all college students who seek teacher certification should take a course in psychological counseling. They demand that every teacher candidate should have a minimum knowledge of student counseling. Also, local boards of education started employing full-time certified psychological counselors, though their number is still limited. It is a

widespread belief in the teaching profession in our country that teachers, instead of counselors, should take care of their students' mental health and well being. This will cause more burdens upon teachers, in addition to the mental stress they feel from their heavy workloads in the classroom. We may say that the idea of "division of labor" or "professional specialization" in the teaching profession is not so popular in Japan. It is often said that this is partly because teachers feel it unfair to accept the presence at their schools of such counselors who do not teach in the classrooms. Probably, we should gradually change this tradition for the future generation. We are afraid that the present confusion in the schools and classrooms may deter some intelligent and caring college students from entering the teaching profession.

In consideration of these factors, i.e., the decreasing number of children, keener competition to be public schoolteachers, and teachers better qualified as well as more capable of dealing with children's personal and mental problems, the Ministry of Education decided to revise the present teacher certification system in 1998. Some teacher education colleges started new programs this year. This change, unlike the one that is happening in the U.S., is incremental and melioristic rather than innovative and drastic. The following are the main points of revision.¹⁵

Present System	Revised System
Category I	Pedagogy Subjects
	<u>Role of Teachers</u>
Purpose of Education	Purpose of Education
Sociology of Education	Sociology of Education
Curriculum and Teaching	Curriculum Study
	<u>Study on Teaching</u>

Moral Education	Moral Education
Special Activities	Special Activities
Teaching Method (2 credits)	Teaching Method <u>(4 credits)</u>
Category II Psychology Subjects	
Developmental Psychology	Developmental Psychology
Guidance and Counseling	Guidance
	<u>Counseling</u>
Category III Practicum	
5 credits(Primary School)	5 credits(Primary School)
3 credits(Junior High School)	<u>5 credits(Junior High School)</u>
3 credits(Senior High School)	3 credits(Senior High School)
Category IV Related Subject Requirement	
Japanese Constitution	Japanese Constitution
Physical Education	Physical Education
	<u>Computer Education</u>
	<u>English Conversation</u>

As this figure shows, two or three new subjects in pedagogy, one in psychology, and a seminar in integrated learning, English communication, and computer education will be added to the required subjects of the present certification system. The teaching practicum will be increased from two weeks to four weeks. In addition to the practicum, all students enrolled in teacher certification programs are required to attend a practicum for five days at welfare institutions and two days at schools for the handicapped in the year 2000 (some students started to engage in this practicum in 1988).

Among teachers and educators, this reform has been considered to be fairly "dramatic" and somewhat burdensome. However, compared with the ongoing reform in teacher education in the U.S., the main focus of this reform is not so clear.¹⁶ I would say that this is nothing but a minor revision and augmentation

of the present certification system. It signals that there is fundamentally nothing wrong with the spirit and method of the present teacher education system and that the important point is how to strengthen to the maximum extent the traditions and premises underlying the present system. In essence, our teacher education system is "cognitively-oriented" or "knowledge-centered" rather than "art-oriented" or "craft-centered."

This cognitive orientation has been strongly reflected in the teacher selection and recruitment process, in which examinations for recruitment that are offered to senior students during summer vacation play a pivotal role. Most of the prefectural and municipal boards of education, which are responsible for the examinations of teacher candidates, require them to take written tests of general knowledge in liberal arts, education and psychology, and their major area of study.¹⁷ Some major areas of study such as English, music, art, and physical education include tests of practical skills and performance. More than 60% of prefectures started to require their candidates to show their teaching skills in simulation classes at the selection procedure.¹⁸ Now this is becoming a popular trend which most of the local boards of education will make a requirement in the future.

We gradually understand that it is important to recognize "teaching as an art or craft." However, we assert that this idea is not well reflected and rooted in the teacher selection procedure in our country. As is the case with the selection of other civil servants, examinations play a critical role in teacher selection, which will promise the candidates tenure, i.e. the right to pursue their career until their retirement. Because of the keen competition for public schoolteachers in

recent years, only talented candidates with high cognitive intelligence will be selected.

As of July 1999, the government proposed that "personality" or the "humane" aspect of teacher candidates be respected and that it be an essential element in the teacher selection procedure. For this objective to be actualized, it is also suggested that the minimum passing standard for the initial selection procedure, in which the written part of the examination is central, be introduced and the evaluation of personality be a focal point in the second selection stage. This policy is basically similar to the present selection procedure, though the difference can be found in the extent to which the personality aspect will be emphasized and the cognitive aspect de-emphasized. I consider that four weeks of teaching practicum is not enough for training and mastering the basic crafts of teaching. Also, one week of caring practicum in welfare institutions does not necessarily prove that the candidate is a caring person. While personality is a basic requirement for teacher candidates, the important thing is what kind of arts and crafts in teaching and caring they have mastered and they can perform for the assistance and promotion of students' growth. Here, we feel that another reform will be unavoidable for a further qualitative improvement of our teaching profession within a decade or so.

The next task is to upgrade the quality of teachers-in-service. Adding to the policy of enrichment in in-service training conducted for teachers in the past decade, the Council on Teacher Education suggested in 1998 that graduate schools of education should contribute to the upgrading of teachers by establishing more Master's and doctoral programs.¹⁹ Despite the fact that the number of undergraduate student enrollments

has been cut down, it is expected that we will have to accept more graduate students and teachers. In 1997, 3,221 students were enrolled in all national graduate schools of education, among whom 1,009 teachers were enrolled as Master's candidates.²⁰ In 1998, the number of teachers enrolled in those graduate schools was approximately 1,500.

According to the report, it is estimated that between 5,000 and 9,000 teachers will be enrolled in those schools every year from the year 2000 to 2004 and that between 8,000 and 13,000 teachers will be enrolled every year from the year 2005 to 2009.²¹ This number is quite huge compared with the total number of Master's students enrolled in all fields of study, which was 119,406 in 1997. In 1997, the percentages of teachers already acquired a Master's degree are 4.4% among primary school teachers, 8.2% among junior high school teachers, and 15.3% among senior high school teachers.²² The report asserts that these percentages will be doubled and tripled, respectively, within the next decade. These numbers are more than the ones estimated by the government policy of "doubling" the total number of graduate students in the next decade. The achievement of this goal will depend upon the number of teachers who wish to be enrolled in newly-established Master's programs. If we succeed in accepting a large number of teachers, then the actual number of students enrolled in the graduate schools of education may be tripled in the near future. For this policy to be confirmed and actualized, we need a further "enactment" at the national level which will make it a requirement for teachers to obtain a Master's degree as a necessary qualification for continuing their careers. Such a situation may become a reality, if progress toward the goal of these increased numbers should be delayed or not achieved.

National teacher education colleges are trying hard to establish more Master's programs in order to match this trend and demand. Unlike some graduate schools of education in America which abolished their undergraduate programs for teacher education, the colleges of education in our country should manage both undergraduate and graduate programs by the same faculty members. It will take some time to see if this plan will work well or not. Our colleges of education are also struggling hard to survive for the new century.

3. The Impact of "Inquiry-Based Learning" upon Student Learning

One of the surprising phenomena for college teachers is that most of our junior students do not know how to write five- or ten-page papers with citations and footnotes. It is a commonplace in our country that most college students do not know how to conduct research activities and to write academic papers based on those activities. During their three or more years of preparation for college entrance examinations, high school students have never encouraged to write excellent papers, since pursuing such a goal is believed to detract from students' test results. In our country, the dominant learning style of college-bound high school students is that of mastering test-taking skills or that of cramming basic knowledge and information and reproducing them as quickly as possible. It is a learning style of finding adequate answers to the given questions from a stock of memorized knowledge and information. In that sense, it is an effective but passive way of learning.

Some teachers say that tests provide high school students incentives to study, otherwise their time might be wasted. They say that students are trained to be intellectually tough through testing. The same logic will be applied to college entrance examinations and, thus, the system of testing has been justified

and legitimatized. This tradition has spoiled high school education in two ways. One problem is that the students will study hard the "mainstream" subjects required for entrance examinations but will disregard other subjects as "marginal" or useless. This will lead to another problem. College-bound high school students do not wish to study those subjects that are not required for entrance examinations. Both high school teachers and college professors started to deplore the fact that students who wish to major in social sciences at colleges have studied only one subject (e.g., Japanese history) and have not taken any other related subjects in the social science field (e.g., Western history, geography, or ethics). Also, students bound for a major in engineering or natural sciences do not study all the major science subjects such as biology, physics, and chemistry at high schools. Even students can enter medical schools (in Japan, medical schools are 6-year institutions) without studying "biology" at high schools, since they can choose instead to take tests in physics and chemistry at the entrance examinations. Some college teachers started to criticize the college entrance examination system for distorting high school education in these ways.

In this system, the introduction of a new subject, "integrated learning" or inquiry-based learning, into the high school curriculum will be less influential insofar as it is not relevant to college entrance examinations. It is still too early to predict and evaluate its impact. The same thing may be said about junior high school education. In spite of the intentions of the government reports, the effects of inquiry-based teaching and learning upon student learning seem to be limited especially at the academic secondary schools where the end results of students' education will be evaluated by entrance examinations. There might be some advantage for a

group of students who really master the spirit and methods of inquiry-based learning during high school, if colleges find that what these students have mastered will be highly effective for succeeding in college courses. Since many colleges and departments started accepting high school students by "recommendations and interviews" (or sometimes by a writing test in place of interview), the content of inquiry-based education will be of utmost importance.²³

The effects of the new type of learning will be most evident at the primary education level. Except for a handful of children who wish to enroll at private secondary schools (and who consequently would focus on "cramming" for the examinations), elementary school children will enjoy this new type of learning. Elementary schools will be the best places to introduce a kind of "core curriculum," which was popular 40 years ago and is now newly decorated and filled with new subject matter and topics. The aim of this new subject is to create such "activity-centered, experiential curricula" that will cultivate the habit of inquiry in students through commitment to the selected topics. Students are expected to learn the basic skills of problem solving. Those skills include observation, collection of information and data, communication of ideas through discussion and debate, group and cooperative work, constructive and expressive work, etc. Students are expected to learn these skills in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Also, they will develop their own unique interests and individual abilities through fully utilizing those skills. Computer education is expected to contribute to these learning activities. Just as the progressive schools proliferated in America during the first half of this century, some Japanese public schools have been developing this type of curriculum and teaching for many years. They will function as "demonstration

schools" for the further development and refinement of experiential programs. This new subject will be introduced to elementary and secondary schools in the year 2002.

Another objective of this new subject is that it will nurture in students a comprehensive art of learning. It promotes in students various abilities such as self-expression, communicative skills, discovery and invention, practical efficiency, skillfulness in interpersonal relations, cooperation, and so on. It may work as a matrix of nurturing "multiple intelligences," as Howard Gardner suggests.²⁴ Behind this idea, there lies a new expectation that schools should play an integral role in strengthening the ties between home and community. As is indicated by the government reports, schools should be reorganized into "new centers of living and learning" where students will engage in various activities which are extensions of family education and idealized parts of community services. They clearly suggest that the school be a "multipurpose organization," in and through which students can seek not only intellectual and cognitive studies but also all kinds of life skills.

In establishing this new role of schools, the Ministry of Education is fulfilling its own sense of "mission " while it is urging teachers and educators to do the same. In the same vein, students are encouraged to develop their own "will and power to live" and to create a foundation for discovering their own self-identities and individualities. In this sense, we educators feel it necessary to cultivate the sense of "individualism" among students in schools, which, in turn, will contribute to the development of the tradition of individual responsibility and decision-making in the larger society. It is not yet sure if this new education will create a unique

Japanese version of individualism. Here, we can learn some lessons from American experiences.

In this connection, we should mention that colleges and universities ought to play an important role in the reconstruction of primary and secondary education in our country. Colleges and universities have a critical function in determining the nature and contents of secondary education. High schools and their students are highly influenced by the college education policy, especially the policy of college entrance examinations. In some sense, college entrance examinations influence and form the minds and attitudes of college-bound high school students. As some researchers observe, age 18 is a critical period for Japanese youth mainly because it determines the basic direction of their future lives.²⁵ It has been widely believed that a high school diploma is a necessity for getting a decent job and that entrance into a score of highly competitive colleges is an essential condition for pursuing a career as a future "elite." Now, this belief is being shaken partly because within a decade or so the time will come when every college-bound high school student can be enrolled in some type of college, if they do not seek a seat at a big-name prestigious college.

Therefore, it is highly important for college educators to take an initiative to make clear to incoming first-year students the goals and requirements of their college level courses. College "education," rather than "entrance examination," is more important now. We have to prepare for the time when the inclusive education, not initial examination, will be proof of the worth of college. For college education, the introduction of "standards" as well as "choice" is now the key word. First, in search of new standards at colleges and universities, we

should notice that entrance examinations will be diversified and, consequently, "polarized." While entrance examinations are highly competitive for some colleges, they will be simply nominal for others.

Secondly, more sophisticated "standards" of evaluating college curricula and teaching will soon be instituted. Since we have not established a clear idea of what constitutes the "program" in college education - except for some professional schools like medical schools - new evaluation systems which will satisfy the global standards should be urgently established. Also, since college teachers have never been evaluated for their "teaching performance," a new system of faculty development and teaching evaluation should be immediately installed.

Thirdly, college students should be trained to study and master the inquiry-based learning. Since high schools do not teach students how to write research papers, to conduct library research, or to participate in seminars, colleges should teach them the orientation and methods of research and inquiry during the four years, which will lay a solid foundation for them to pursue graduate studies in the future. Needless to say, traditional types of testing and quizzes are essential for students to prepare for such job examinations as civil servants, lawyers, medical doctors, CPAs, and teachers. However, more emphasis should be placed upon constructive and expressive types of learning. College education should be a matrix for exploring self and occupational identities by providing more inquiry-based learning activities.

The introduction of a new style of learning at the primary and secondary schools will not be so effective if college education does not change. Tougher standards are now most

essential for colleges and universities. Soon, the college teachers themselves may be under fire from their frustrated classes, since the inquiring spirit which is pervasive in the minds of researchers and scholars teaching at colleges and universities will be unable to penetrate and affect the minds of the increasingly unprepared students.

Conclusion

In the middle of the economic recession, there is occurring an unexpected and unprecedented restructuring of public and private institutions and organizations. Educational institutions are no exception to this restructuring. Within several years, there will appear a new configuration of educational institutions due to the introduction of the market principle and, in some institutions, the application of global standards. Now, teachers and educators are worrying about this drastic change.

For the time being, children are suffering from a heavy subject load and hard work, whereas adults, including college students, have enjoyed the prospect of a stable and prosperous life protected by seniority system and lifetime employment. This pattern may be reversed in the near future. Soon the time will come when college students and adults should face the harsh realities of continuous training, self-improvement, and recertification. For the past twenty years, even the idea of "lifelong learning" in Japan has been half a fantasy and half a reality. Soon, it will be a full reality owing to the constantly changing social and occupational demands.

Education, especially school education, is becoming more and more "pragmatic" and "individualistic" in its orientation. We have been practical in the sense that we have stressed the

knowledge necessary for examinations, since this has been the "most important and useful knowledge" for our children. As our life pattern changes, so does our education. We are more conscious of the effectiveness of what we learn at schools. For example, English teachers spend more time for studying oral communication, since a quarter or third of the English test of the entrance examination for high schools will consist of listening comprehension. National colleges and universities have started testing students' listening comprehension in English at the time of entrance examinations. Also, parents are more conscious of their own interests in education. Some educators feel it is inevitable that the idea of "accountability" in education be introduced and shared as an essential element in assessing educational performance.

In this connection, the judgment and evaluation of teachers' aptitudes and abilities change. The emphasis will be shifted from what kind of knowledge the candidates have learned to how they can empower individual students and care for their interests and abilities. In the present reform, teachers are considered to be a profession geared to empower children by providing a multitude of learning experiences where they can learn how to care for themselves and others. Students are required to learn how to be independent and to care for themselves. This is what is meant by the "will and power to live." We may call this orientation "individualism in education." Needless to say, we have to be careful not to make it a closed type of individualism or isolationism.

Finally, I should mention that the ongoing educational reform in our country will be strongly influenced by American education. As in the past, we have copied so many educational ideas and devices invented in the U.S. schools and colleges for

the present educational reform. However, those copies are always planted in a different cultural soil. Some of the past ones failed, others have been distorted, and still others can survive. We should create our original educational programs by integrating these ideas and methods with those of our own educational tradition. We will check and see the results of these tasks at our future meetings.

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